

WASHINGTON, DC – Today, Rep. Pete Stark responded to passage in the House of HR 2631, legislation guaranteeing that Members of Congress and federal employees aren't subjected to the paltry prescription drug benefit seniors will receive under the Medicare prescription drug bill passed by the House nearly two weeks ago. The following is Rep. Stark's statement:

"We've heard the President, Republican Members of Congress, Administration officials, and Republican Senators claim time and time again that their Medicare prescription drug plan will provide seniors with the same choices as Members of Congress get. They've said that if FEHBP is good enough for federal employees and Members of Congress alike, it should be good enough for seniors.

"That's a great message and I'm sure it sells well with seniors. Unfortunately, their rhetoric fails to match the reality. The drug benefit they are willing to provide to Medicare beneficiaries is far less than the drug benefit provided to federal employees.

"We've been trying to expose this hypocrisy for months. Today, the Republicans point out the truth themselves.

"This bill, authored by Rep. Tom Davis, requires that each health plan in FEHBP agree to provide the same drug benefit to federal retirees as they do to active employees.

"In other words, it protects federal employees from ever having their retiree drug benefits reduced to the level that the bill's author just supported for the rest of our nation's retirees!

"Rep. Davis represents an awful lot of federal employees and he knows that the Medicare drug benefit is inadequate. Therefore, he's here today – the very first legislative day we are back in session after having passed the Republican Medicare drug bill – to get a fix for his constituents and himself.

“If the Republican drug bill was as good a benefit as federal employees and Members of Congress receive, Rep. Tom Davis and others would not be here today ensuring that federal employees are never forced to give up their FEHBP coverage and find themselves with only the Medicare drug benefit his party has legislated.

“But, the Medicare drug benefit isn’t as good. That’s why they’re here.

“Unfortunately, they are ignoring the problems that will be faced by the millions of seniors and people with disabilities who are not federal employees or Members of Congress.

“The Congressional Budget Office has told us that if the Republican Drug Bill becomes law, one-third of employers will drop their retiree drug coverage. That will cause millions of Americans to lose the coverage they have today only to be replaced with the inadequate benefit put forth by the Republicans. Yet, nothing in this bill will help them.

“Put frankly, we can’t buy a health plan in FEHBP with as poor drug coverage as is included in the Republican Medicare prescription drug bill that was passed last week.

Rather than protect us from having to suffer with inadequate coverage with the rest of America’s seniors, we should be considering a bill that guarantees all America’s seniors and people with disabilities with a drug benefit as good as Members of Congress get.

“Unfortunately, Republicans refuse to go along with that.”